



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# Modern Philology

VOLUME XIX

February 1922

NUMBER 3

## ENGLISH CRITICISM OF THE "PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN" IN GOETHE'S *FAUST*

As late as the year 1883, John Stuart Blackie in his Preface to *The Wisdom of Goethe*<sup>1</sup> is obliged to confess that there were but few unbiased readers of the German poet on the English side of the Channel, and that the bad impression which still existed in England of Goethe's character might neutralize anything favorable said of him. After relating an anecdote illustrating the superficial remarks of two egotistical English gentlemen concerning a German work of plastic art, he continues: "Besides this easy habit of an assumed superiority, so natural to empty minds, there is in the case of Goethe the unquestioned fact of a great gap between the English and the German mind, which even Englishmen of large culture and high principle find it difficult to overbridge."<sup>2</sup> Blackie then proceeds with keen analytical sense to give the differentiating moral and mental characteristics of the two nations concerned. The practical Briton believes German enthusiasm is a fault; the Englishman is guided by external expediency rather than by internal principle; he is constitutional in his mode of thinking rather than philosophical, contemplative, and emotional like his German brother; and above all, his religion is ecclesiastical rather than spiritual.

English thinkers themselves realize, then, that in many respects the average Anglo-Saxon in his internal make-up is the polar opposite

<sup>1</sup> New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>2</sup> Preface, pp. xii-xiv.

of the German, and that there is an almost impassible barrier between the two, which even time cannot wholly remove. An instructive illustration of this fundamental barrier is the English attitude toward the "Prologue in Heaven" in Goethe's *Faust*, a work universally acknowledged to be a masterpiece.

The "Prologue" has always been more or less of a stumbling-block to fastidious Englishmen, and even those with at least a potentially sympathetic attitude of mind and an honest endeavor to understand its import have encountered serious difficulties. For almost a century English critics and translators have clashed on the importance and meaning of the "Prologue"; pages have been written on the propriety of introducing the devil into the presence of the Lord, and commentaries reveal a ceaseless expenditure of time and energy on Goethe's alleged levity and irreverence. The Weimar master innocently thought it an asset to base the scene on the Book of Job, and that it exalted the key to the problems of his hero to localize the wager in heaven. But alas! It became the most vulnerable part of his work to British readers, *the* bone of ethical and religious contention, an unpardonable transgression against the very Deity from which they shrank in holy horror and condemnation. Dramatic technicalities and poetic qualities were forgotten or disregarded in moralizing reproofs and apprehensions over Goethe's "blasphemy." No wonder that so many failed to see the connection between Parts I and II and assigned Faust logically and unhesitatingly, as an unrepentant seducer and murderer, to eternal damnation, according to the austere demands of the established church!

It was this inherent attitude toward and misinterpretation of the "Prologue in Heaven" which so often led to misunderstanding of the author's deeper philosophy of the whole drama, and from the record of the treatment of this scene by English critics and some forty-odd translators of *Faust* we can obtain incidentally an excellent idea of English judgment and English propensities in general.

It is a strangely interesting variety of opinions and modes of action which are represented in this treatment of the "Prologue." In the beginning, before the appearance of Part II, it was often a case of plain inability to see any clue to the solution of the *Faust*

problem in the part in question. It was an oversight, maybe inexcusable, but nevertheless an honest oversight, and the English student of *Faust* groped vainly about in the dark seeking some plausible idea of Goethe's ultimate intentions. One translator leaves out the "Prologue" because of personal objections; another for practical, diplomatic reasons. One seems to admire it secretly, but sees himself compelled to bow to the feelings of the public and omit the scene; another is afraid to omit it, because a certain critic holds it indispensable to an understanding of the drama. Again, a translator finds a way out of the perplexity by making a compromise and limiting his translation to the Archangels' Song; still another satisfies his conscience—and leaves the problem in safe obscurity—by printing the German "der Herr" instead of the more objectionable "the Lord." Some understand the purport of the "Prologue" completely; others profess they see no necessary relation whatever between that and the Gretchen tragedy. Some treat the part separately, as a unit by itself; others insert it in its proper place, if for no other reason than to be true to the original, in an external way at least, and not expose themselves to the charge of omission. Only twenty-four years ago a translator, McClintock, regarded the "Prologue" merely as a harmless effusion, good enough in itself, but of no further consequence.

Naturally, as the nineteenth century draws to a close there is less emphasis on the moral and religious aspects of the "Prologue" and more on its dramatic and aesthetic import, but even the most ardent, learned, and sympathetic translators of *Faust* deem it advisable to *explain* at length the insertion of the scene either on technical or historical grounds or on general principles of common sense, modernity, and broadmindedness. Blackie himself omits the "Prologue" from the text of his first edition of *Faust*, but slips it into a "Post Script" in an emasculated form, omitting entirely the offensive last four lines. In his second edition of 1880 it is introduced in its proper place; that is, the English attitude is obviously changed as time goes on, and we must concede considerable aesthetic development in the right direction. That the "Prologue" offers serious obstacles to be overcome, is certain. Whatever the translator's own opinions were, he was constantly torn

between public sentiment, which up to about 1860 at least must have been tolerably strong against it, and the relentless attacks of certain intellectual critics who favored and understood the "Prologue" but who could conceal their identity, if necessary, and save their moral reputation behind the anonymity of an editorial staff. It took moral courage to champion publicly the merits and purpose of a dramatic scene where Mephisto and the Lord were actually engaged in conversation. It was a hazardous undertaking for a lover of Goethe who wanted both recognition for his scholarship and buyers for his translation. This dilemma can easily be discerned in the notes, prefaces, and introductions to the various editions of *Faust*.

In justice to Englishmen, however, it must be stated that many of a deeper and more independent turn of mind and open heart have argued in favor of the "Prologue" with admirable conviction, and the writer's principal source material for this paper has been taken from criticisms by English Goethe students. These have recognized the pettiness, narrow-mindedness, and senselessness of the unfavorable conceptions of other countrymen and have not been slow to take them to task for it. Both English and American commentators have upbraided them for "prudishness" and "squeamishness," and when George Henry Lewes makes the unequivocal explanation apropos the "Prologue" that "Mephisto is not a hypocrite: he cannot pay even *that* homage to virtue,"<sup>1</sup> we cannot help thinking that Lewes implies an even more serious charge against some of his race. But let us pass to more specific data.

In an unfavorable article on *Faust* in the *Monthly Review* for 1810,<sup>2</sup> attributed to William Taylor of Norwich, reference is made to the "Prologue in Heaven," and while this scene is not called profane, vulgar, or obscene, like the rest of the tragedy, its significance is overlooked.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that Madame de Staël did not mention the "Prologue" in *L'Allemagne*, published three years later, nor did August Wilhelm Schlegel in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, which appeared in English translation in 1815. This may account in part for the subsequent attitude

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Works of Goethe* (Everyman's edition), p. 469.

<sup>2</sup> LXII, 491.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. William Frederic Hauhart, *The Reception of Goethe's Faust in England in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1909), p. 25.

of some prominent English writers, for both of these foreigners were held in great esteem in England.

The first printed disapproval of the "Prologue" dates from 1820, when the reviewer of *Outlines to Goethe's Faust* (first published by Retzsch in 1816), "with a feeling of self-conscious superiority," passes a condemnatory judgment on the scene in the *London Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> He writes: "The Germans have not yet resigned that freedom of manner which may be considered as a proof of innocence or of impudence, according as it is traced to simplicity of heart, or contempt for those things which most people consider sacred. In short, they take liberties with attributes, names, and characters, in which it would not be pardonable for us to follow them, because we in our country have got far beyond the patriarchal stage. They do not hesitate still to introduce the person of the Deity in compositions of mixed nature."<sup>2</sup> This reviewer knew the analogy of the "Prologue" to the proem of the Book of Job.

When the Irish barrister, John Anster, first rendered a few selections of *Faust* into English verse in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*, the same year, he objected to the "Prologue." He believed it was written "in a light and irreverent tone" with "very little merit of any kind." Since he failed to divine its meaning he had to explain the moral issue in another way.<sup>3</sup> The anonymous translation of 1821 omitted the "Prologue" and "Walpurgis Night." When Carlyle published a criticism of *Faust* in the *New Edinburgh Review*, in April of the following year, no mention was made of the scene, and in the discussion of the main problem he had to seek light elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Nor did Walter Scott grasp the purpose of the part, asserting that "nobody but a German would ever have provoked a comparison with the Book of Job, the grandest poem that ever was written."<sup>5</sup> It is generally assumed, the testimony of H. C. Robinson to the contrary notwithstanding,<sup>6</sup> that Coleridge's charge of licentiousness, vulgarity, blasphemy, and want of religion in the language of *Faust* refers chiefly to the "Prologue." In fact, in giving his

<sup>1</sup> I, 137.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hauhart, *The Reception of Goethe's "Faust" in England*, pp. 32-33, where this passage is quoted.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence* (Boston, 1877), I, 254.

reasons for refusing to render it into English, he expressed the doubt whether it became his moral character to translate a work of that kind.<sup>1</sup>

In 1822 George Soane made a translation of 576 lines of *Faust*, including the "Prologue," which is said to have been seen and applauded by Goethe, but it was not printed until many years later.<sup>2</sup> The first printed translation of the "Prologue" appears to have been made by Shelley, as a separate item, and published in 1824 among his *Posthumous Poems*.

Lord Francis Leveson Gower, in his *Faust* translation of 1825, "countenanced the worst of English prejudices" and terminated the "Prologue" with the song of the Archangels, an act which greatly astonished Goethe, who could not understand the reason for this aggravation. It is worthy of note that in 1828 an observing critic of Goethe's works writing in the *Foreign Review and Continental Miscellany* for March,<sup>3</sup> readily draws the conclusion that Faust will not be sent to perdition, but without seeking or detecting the solution in the "Prologue in Heaven."

During the next two decades, with the growing interest in *Faust* and the publication of the completed work and numerous English translations, the "Prologue" is subjected to a new series of trials, ending now in reluctant or unstinted appreciation, now in silent or open disapprobation; now in recognition, either partial or complete, and again in absolute rejection. It is one continuous seesaw of eulogies and blame.

Few Englishmen, however, entertain any opposition to the Archangels' chants of the "Prologue." These and Margaret's monologue at the spinning wheel are translated anonymously in the *Dublin University Magazine* for 1836;<sup>4</sup> John Edmund Reade, Esq., did the chants into English in 1840; and Sir George Lefèvre, M.D., condescends to include them in his English rendering of *Faust*, Part I, in 1841 and 1843, although the remainder of the "Prologue" is ignored without comment.

In 1832 there appeared a new edition of *Faustus* (the greater part of *Faust*, Part I, translated into verse connected by a prose

<sup>1</sup> Hauhart, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> In *Archiv. f. d. Studium d. n. Sprachen*, CXII, 280-93.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 429-68.

<sup>4</sup> VII, 278-302.

narrative) with Retzsch's *Outlines* engraved by Henry Moses, and the *May-Day Night* in an "Addenda" by Shelley. The Preface tells us (p. vi): "Some parts are omitted which, it was thought, would be offensive to English readers, from the free, and occasionally immoral tendency of the allusions which they contain." After acknowledging a difference in taste between the two nations concerned, we are informed that this would have rendered "a clear translation of that which in Germany is considered sublime in our [English] language ludicrous." Reasons for omitting the Prelude are given and then the Preface proceeds: "For a different reason the 'Prologue' has also been passed over: it carries the scene to heaven, whither Mephistopheles ascends for the purpose of obtaining permission to tempt Faustus; and both in conception and execution is repugnant to notions of propriety such as are entertained in this country."

The anonymous translator of 1834 reaches a similar verdict. "I have not translated the 'Prologue in Heaven,'" he confesses, "as I cannot but think that the tone of the levity with which it treats matters of the most sacred nature must be repugnant to English feelings."<sup>1</sup>

That John Stuart Blackie relegated the "Prologue" to a postscript in his first edition of Part I, 1834, has already been noted. Even in the "Post Script" a dozen lines are left out because of their assumed levity. Otherwise the "Prologue" is worth studying, he thinks, for it contains the key to the character of Faust and Mephisto, and of their mutual relation to the Great Being who guides all. Blackie had actually translated the *whole* of the scene, but was dissuaded from inserting it in its proper place by friends whose opinion he respected. Moreover, he gives it in "somewhat castigated shape" that will satisfy "every reasonable person of proper feeling." That is, he consulted the feelings of those for whom the translation was made. In its original form the "Prologue" could not fail to repel, he believed, and so removed the "colloquial familiarities, which are the chief blemish in the original." Nothing could convince him that this "tone of careless familiarity" in which things divine were here spoken of was "in any wise worthy of the great poet from whom it

<sup>1</sup> Preface, p. vii.



came."<sup>1</sup> But now that the conversational levity had been removed, he felt there was nothing in his translation that could give offence even "to the most straight-laced orthodoxy." Now it would give pleasure to all, "except those of impure or ignoble minds whose memory is retentive of obscenities and levities." In brief, Blackie bowed at first, though reluctantly perhaps, to public sentiment for reasons of prudence, while secretly cherishing many beauties of the drama that his friends did not comprehend.

John Hills, Esq., regrets in 1840<sup>2</sup> that he has to omit the "Prologue in Heaven" but maintains that it is not essential to the understanding of the poem. It was "an after-thought as it was an after-production." Yet the real excuse for the omission is the ordinary one then in vogue. Hills admits that "the charge of irreverence and profanity which has been brought against the 'Prologue'" has had considerable weight with him. He implies that even though it could be defended "by and over a cold intellect" it would leave the "heart unsatisfied amid the wreck of its accustomed associations."

In the interim the importance of the "Prologue" had been definitely set forth by the *Quarterly Review* in 1826.<sup>3</sup> A. Hayward had not hesitated to include the abused scene for the sake of completeness in his prose version of Part I, 1833, and to censure Lord Gower for leaving it out on grounds of "decency." Hayward claimed boldly that Lord Gower had imparted an immoral tendency to the poem which he thus professed to purify, and that it "unwittingly" fixed "a stigma on the moral and religious character of Goethe."<sup>4</sup> Besides, Hayward pointed out that Goethe's expression "den Alten" was not necessarily a disrespectful designation—he criticised Shelley for rendering it by "the Old Fellow"—and recalled Shakespeare's contention that a fallen angel was still an angel who liked to see the Lord once in a while.<sup>5</sup> Hence Mephisto is in heaven amongst the host. Hayward explained further the relation of the "Prologue" to the Book of Job. Goethe had adhered to the second tradition, in which Satan is not a rebel against the will of God, but a powerful tempter, authorized and appointed as such.

<sup>1</sup> "Post Script," pp. 215, 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Faust, a Tragedy by Goethe*, London, Berlin, 1840.

<sup>3</sup> XXXIV, 138.

<sup>4</sup> Translator's Preface, p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> P. 210.

Because of the opinion of the critic in the *Quarterly Review*, David Syme is afraid to omit the "Prologue" in his *Faust*, Part I, in 1834. But in his Preface he immediately throws off as much responsibility as possible upon this writer and then adds an apologetical analogy of his own: "The opening dialogue is strange and startling, but its omission, in one instance, having been considered 'all but fatal to the understanding of the drama,' I retain it. The idea is not bolder than that of Raffaele's fresco on the ceiling of the loggia of the Vatican—God dividing light and darkness—and in both cases the effect depends much on the disposition of the spectator's mind."<sup>1</sup> In the last part of this statement Syme, either consciously or unconsciously, strikes at least one profound truth of the matter.

Another critic, reviewing Goethe's *Nachgelassene Werke* in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* for July, 1833,<sup>2</sup> calls specific attention to the "Prologue in Heaven," in the completed *Faust*, "in which a somewhat irreverent colloquy between Mephistopheles and the Lord is set forth." The writer understands its import and quotes from the poem the portion showing Goethe's plan and the futility of the devil's scheme, and yet he cannot refrain from referring to the conversation as "irreverent."

Dr. Anster, in 1835, has an interesting struggle with himself—at least an external one—about the "Prologue." He finally decides to retain it in his translation, *Faustus, a Dramatic Mystery*, but considers it expedient to devote several pages to a justification of its presence "by bringing all possible arguments for its retention."<sup>3</sup> "I have had great hesitation," says Anster, "in translating some parts of the 'Prologue in Heaven.' To omit it, however—nay, even to disguise or diminish its revolting effect by the colorings and shadings of language—would be to vary essentially the character of the whole drama." Anster then proceeds cautiously to query (and imply) whether, after all, it isn't a matter of taste, and whether the question of morals and good taste might not be left with Goethe. At any rate his is the drama and his the blame. The translator, shielding himself, declares he does not defend "the conception or the execution of this remarkable passage," and deems it a case of poetic freedom, like other "less successful parts of the poem."

<sup>1</sup> Preface, pp. 1-2.<sup>2</sup> XXIII, 81 ff.<sup>3</sup> Hauhart, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

The "admiration of his own country" should be in favor of the dramatist, Anster ventures to suggest, "as against the vague prejudices which in one way or another have possessed the English public" (p. xvi). Mephisto in the "Highest Presence cannot but violently shock and wound the feelings," he goes on to say, "but yet does not this daring levity too remarkably characterize the scepticism, which Mephisto personifies, to have it omitted in any adequate exhibition of that scepticism?" (p. x). "I would suggest," Anster continues diplomatically, "that however shocked the reader may be at first meeting the audacious dialogue, it is not impossible that, on a question of his own art, the great artist may after all be in the right; and that in no other way could he hope so perfectly to exhibit the character of that spirit, to which even in the Highest Presence neither humility nor elevation is possible" (p. xi). And besides, have not fallen angels long been a subject of poetry? A hundred passages could be pointed out in *Paradise Lost* as likely "to offend the taste which declaims against Goethe, for what it pardons—perhaps applauds—in Milton." Somehow one cannot help feeling that Anster personally was tolerably well satisfied with the "Prologue" and just took this opportunity to silence some of the idiotic objections to it. And yet 'twas he that printed "der Herr" instead of "the Lord."

The same year Robert Talbot adopts a new reason for inserting the "Prologue." Says Talbot: "To the few, who, not entering into the general conception of the Poem, might be startled by the apparent boldness of many passages contained in it, a word or two of explanation might not be amiss. Goethe was far from intending to exhibit anything like irreligious levity. This extraordinary Production, it must be recollected, was founded on an old Puppet show, which represented the popular story of Faust; and it was composed upon the model of one of those Scenic Exhibitions, so frequent in the infancy of the Modern Drama; in which not only the Powers of Darkness, and the Angelic Virtues, but the Deity himself was familiarly introduced upon the stage."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Faust of Goethe, Attempted in English Rhyme*, by the Hon. Robert Talbot (London, 1835), p. v.

Still there seems to have been some complaint about Talbot's liberties, for in his second edition of *The Faust of Goethe, Part the First*, 1839, "Revised and much Corrected," he feels compelled to reiterate his assertions in a somewhat different form. "With regard to the seemingly culpable latitude of expression occasionally occurring in the poem [and more particularly in what is called the Prologue in Heaven], however desirable it may be, in point of taste, that it had been more restrained, if not altogether suppressed, it should be always borne in mind, that this drama was composed on the model and in the tone of, the old *Mysteries*; in which liberties, fully as daring, were constantly taken without any offence having been given or intended" (p. xiii). Goethe held in his hand the "Gothic" license of a Gothic composition.

That translators of the complete *Faust*, or of Part II, should understand the necessity of the "Prologue," is only natural. It is included therefore in the anonymous translation of both parts in 1838, without comment or excuses. Archer Gurney in the Preface to his translation of Part II, 1842, sees an opportunity to make once for all a frank statement about the value of the "Prologue": "Surely it is strange—nay almost miraculous—that all this should appear aimless and visionary, that the Second Part should be declared to have little or no connection with the First Part, to afford no satisfactory results. To me the First Part seems incomplete and unsatisfactory without it. We are therefore informed in the 'Prologue' that the *Eternal* aspects of his servant Faust will vanquish the powers of darkness" (vii).

Jonathan Birch, translator of Parts I and II, 1839–43, understood both the drama and the English attitude, prepared his translation accordingly, and catered to the public in a novel method. "Relative to this translation," declares Birch, "I have proposed to myself to give the *meaning* of my author fully, neither skipping over nor avowedly leaving out any part; but studiously masking such passages as might be considered objectionable to delicacy."<sup>1</sup> Birch explains that Mephisto is the "Tempter of Mankind: His Language is of the sarcastic, not the boldly defying, which Milton puts into the mouth of Satan. Such *Mysteries* were common in England

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Birch, Esq., *Faust, a Tragedy*, Part I (London, Leipzig, 1839), p. xi.



regretted the "blemishes" of *Faust*; nevertheless, the much-criticised part is inserted. The English reproductions of 1860 and 1862, by v. Beresford and John Galvan, respectively, that of Theodore Martin, 1865, and that of Charles Hartpole Bowen, 1878 (said to have been done about 1837), contain the "Prologue" with little or no comment. Galvan indicates his knowledge of the biblical analogy to the Book of Job.

George Henry Lewes, in his revised edition of the *Life and Works of Goethe*, 1864, devoted three pages to elucidate and justify the troublesome "Prologue." After a brief reference to the strange misunderstandings of previous commentators, he, also, is obliged to confess that his "first impression was strongly against it; an impression which was only removed by considering the legendary nature of the poem, and the legendary style adopted."<sup>1</sup> Goethe treated this part in the medieval style, like a Miracle Play, where the coarsest buffoonery ran side by side with the most serious lessons; where "things the most sacred are made the subject of jests and stories which would send a shudder through the pious readers of our times."<sup>2</sup> Hence there is no blasphemy intended, Lewes informs his countrymen; it is merely a representation "which uncultured minds naïvely accepted." "An inferior artist would assuredly have made this Prologue as grand and metaphysical as possible. Goethe intentionally made it naïve.—He was led to write this scene by his study of the older literature, and the source of its inspiration is traceable in this naïveté."<sup>3</sup> Then there are two *organic* necessities for the "Prologue," Lewes points out: (a) Faust is an *individual* soul struggling heavenward, since heaven is the center and goal of all struggles, doubts, and reverence; (b) *Faust* is a drama of temptation which issues from heaven. Lewes believed that both "prologues," as he calls them, were "afterthoughts."

A translator who seems to fathom the deeper meaning of *Faust*, is Thomas E. Webb, a professor at the University of Dublin, whose work appeared in 1880, a banner year for *Faust* translations. Webb calls the drama a "chain of motives." As such it is unquestionably

<sup>1</sup> Everyman's edition, p. 467.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

a work of art, and the moral, and motives, he rightly contends, are found in the "Prologue in Heaven." Besides, "the only aspect of the Medieval Mystery which it presents is to be found, not in the drama itself, but in the Prologue in Heaven, by which it is preceded."<sup>1</sup> "Though man be wretched and insignificant," Webb continues, "and nature be beautiful and great, yet man possesses what nature never can possess—a conscious, never-ceasing struggle for moral excellence and beauty." Mephisto has no conception of such a struggle, sees only dissatisfaction, believes in the omnipotence of sensual joys, and Faust is delivered over to him for temptation.

We mentioned above that J. S. Blackie castigated the "Prologue" in his first edition of his *Faust* translation and prudently interred it in a postscriptum. By 1880 he thought differently of the "latitudinarian principles," so "peculiar to German Esthetics," resuscitated it in a second edition, and gave it its proper place. He still believed, however, that the second part was aesthetically a "brilliant blunder and magnificent mistake," and that ethically Faust could be saved only according to medieval orthodox Christianity—which, after all, was very accommodating to human weakness—and not according to our own more severe modern views demanding protracted confession, repentance, and amendment. Hence, even for Blackie of 1880 there was still a *moral* dissatisfaction. Yet, he passed a verdict of condemnation on his first edition, regarding it as a "juvenile performance," which had done the best service of which it was capable by teaching him his ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

Evidently, knowledge of Goethe's masterpiece had made noticeable progress in England by this time, for Blackie assures us, incidentally, that the "movement of the original, in all its changes," had long been "as familiar as the responses of the Church Service to a devout Episcopalian."<sup>3</sup>

Whether this is strictly true, is at least doubtful, for in the same year, 1880, another enthusiastic translator, James Adey Birds, is prompted to review the charges against the whole poem and to answer these in a lengthy introduction and explanatory notes. He

<sup>1</sup> Translator's Preface, pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary (second edition), p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

admits without reservation that the "Prologue" has been the chief ground for the accusation of blasphemy, and advances a strong line both of old and new arguments refuting the charges. The devil cannot be expected to speak like an orthodox clergyman, says Birds, borrowing from another source, and objections to the language must lie with the character of the objector. "And the same may be said in reply to the other charges of licentiousness and vulgarity. There is no more of either than is necessary to portray the characters and scenes."<sup>1</sup> In other words, it's a plain case of *honi soit qui mal y pense*. As though in a desperate effort to silence adverse criticism, Birds dwells at length upon the various conceptions of the Deity. He interprets the Oriental idea of "der Alte" as the "Ancient of Days." He explains that the anthropomorphic conception of Goethe's creation had to be different from the narrow and limited ideas of Luther's time, and that the poet could not revive the old, low form for his aesthetic purpose. 'Twas time, says Birds, that the English had advanced beyond the idea of God as a "magnified man," as stereotyped in the sculptures and pictures of medieval times. The Deity must be represented as a great and mysterious Spirit or Cause, incapable of adequate representation in any form, and might just for that reason be represented in any way without derogatory intentions. Any form might be selected for a *special purpose*, provided the intention was not to degrade the idea. To quote directly: "The sense of profanity or none in the representation depends upon the degree to which the mind is disengaged from merely Jewish and Medio-Christian conceptions of the Deity. If this be complete, as was the case with Goethe, the mind will be in no danger of confounding the representation with the ideal object of its own worship. To those, then, whose minds are so disengaged, there is no blasphemy in the Prologue, but only a want of reasonableness—excusable, however, on many grounds—in his accusers."<sup>2</sup>

This tactful defense, argumentation, and constructive criticism of an Englishman like Birds, the sincerity, earnestness, enthusiasm, cosmopolitanism, and the desire to illumine and to eradicate the insular prejudices of some of his countrymen commands our undivided respect and gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> *Faust* (London, 1880), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction, p. 80.



Yes, English criticism of the "Prologue," as well as of *Faust* in general, had been modified by 1880. Translators were no longer afraid to include this much-maligned portion of Goethe's work. Yet the long and ever recurring explanations of students like Lewes, Blackie, Webb, and Birds show that the process of altering opinions and convincing Englishmen that the scene in heaven was perfectly safe and sound, was an arduous and often ungrateful task. Nor may we infer that the work of mental modification was completed at this date, or that there was any common understanding of the "Prologue." When translators themselves, who would be expected to study the *Faust* problems more diligently than the ordinary folk, continued to go astray in spite of all efforts, honest or otherwise, what could be forthcoming from others? The condition is the more surprising, since we must presuppose also a great number of ardent *verbal* attempts to enlighten the English public by native non-translators whose creditable, persistent recommendations have been recorded. All in all, we are not a little astonished when, again, seventeen years later, we read the extraordinary convictions of R. McClintock.

McClintock is a curious composite, with theories all his own. One hardly knows at times whether to take him seriously or not. His *Faust* translation (Part I, 1897) is generally conceded to have considerable value, particularly its rhythmical form, but his elaborate Introduction is a conundrum, and if we can believe his statements about the "Prologue," then verily he knew not what he was doing. He is blind, inconsistent, strangely original; and many of his comments savor strongly of attempts at smart writing.

McClintock—and this is in 1897—is convinced not only that both the "Prologue" and Part II are afterthoughts, but that no bridge is possible between the two parts. Consequently the "Prologue" has no importance for him as a connective link, but merely as a portion of good verse by itself, a "sheet anchor," as he calls it, for those believing in the internal revolution of *Faust*. "The Prologue in Heaven," declares McClintock, "fine in itself and for itself, written in 1797, is, as prologue to *Faust*, a mere piece of self-stultification on the part of the author, and was meant to deceive. A picture of titanic man turned to an anthropoid brute was not a thing to

flatter its supposed model. At the same time, the artist was loathe to destroy his own great work. . . . Eighteen years later, the whole drama—pushed to a logical conclusion beyond even the original idea—was given to the world with a prologue pointing strongly in the direction of allegory. A fox-hunter, who had taken in the proceedings, might call it a 'red herring.'"<sup>1</sup>

In the appended notes and comments he takes up the "Prologue" again and expostulates further in an erudite chemical lingo: "That in the quarter of a century which intervened between the planning of the drama and the writing of the Prologue Goethe's ideas had greatly changed may be freely granted. But he himself, and with reference to this very work, has spoken of the difficulty of redissolving in its mother-liquor a precipitate once thrown down. In the case before us, the precipitate crystallised and was deposited before 1775; the matter added in later years was, for the most part, so similar to the original precipitate that its bulk was doubled without appreciable alteration of its chemical properties. At the same time, however, certain small quantities of foreign and dissimilar substances were added. These remain to the critical microscope or acute natural vision, visible as foreign substances, adhering to superficial inequalities, or filling up interstices in the original precipitate which here and there they slightly colour but do not otherwise affect.

"The above amounts to saying that I regard the Prologue in Heaven as a negligible element in the enquiry into the significance of *Faust* as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

But more than that. He criticises all former translations of "der Schalk"—he himself renders it rightly by "wag"—because each is as revolting as the other when placed in the mouth of the Lord of Righteousness. With a tone of self-superiority McClintock harps on the same old theme, and feels a moral terror from the following words of the Lord: "My hatred never burnt 'gainst such as thee;" which to the pious Mr. McClintock is "a deliberate and gratuitous assault on our sentiment of reverence." This in 1897. Somehow the reader cannot help feeling that McClintock alone represents the correct court of judgment from which there is no appeal.

<sup>1</sup> That is, something introduced to deceive, to get the pack of readers off the track, as one might say. Introduction, p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308–9.

A word about the "Prologue in Heaven" on the English stage. The critic for the London *Times*, presumably John Oxenford, implies in October, 1866, when the question came up of presenting *Faust* on the stage, that the first reason why the drama could not be given was because of its "Prologue," "which would be sure to stick fast in the Lord Chamberlain's office." About the same time J. Halford excuses a burlesque on the subject by pointing to Goethe's parody on the Book of Job. Goethe had, he argued, entirely perverted the Holy Writ; therefore Halford felt he had a perfect right to make a travesty of Goethe's work. But the ignorant Halford had evidently never read either Part II itself or any account of it, for he speaks definitely of "Mephistopheles winning his wager with the 'Lord' by his triumph over Faust."

Although Part II has never been staged in England, in its entirety, a part was used in Arrigo Boito's opera "Mefistofele," which was presented in London, July 6, 1880, with Christine Nilsson, the Swedish prima donna, in the rôle of Marguerite and Helena. This opera opened with a "Prologue in Heaven," which, as Dr. F. D. Carpenter informs us in an unpublished dissertation on *English Stage-Adaptations of Goethe's "Faust"* (accessible in the Yale Library<sup>1</sup>), "had to be modified considerably to conform to English stage decorum."

The first, and so far as I know the only, English stage-adaptation of Goethe's work to contain anything like the real "Prologue in Heaven" was one by Stephen Phillips and J. W. Comyns Carr, produced at His Majesty's Theater in 1908. Here heaven is represented by a range of mountains between the sky and earth, and a serious attempt is made to reproduce the proper effect as closely as possible. As the curtain rises three archangels appear, and a chorus of invisible angels is heard.

Such, in brief, is the story of the "Prologue in Heaven" in England. The variety of attitudes exemplify paramount dissimilarities of cultural conceptions between the English and the German people and between the English themselves. It serves, too, as a kind of barometer for certain unique traits of English character.

<sup>1</sup> The William A. Speck collection of Goethe literature contains a practically complete series of English *Faust* translations and stage-adaptations.

Other nationalities have not been offended at Goethe's famous scene, then why the British? Some reasons have been indicated or intimated in this paper. It is not simply a case of deep-seated prejudice or ignorance, or unwillingness to investigate. Other students have already pointed out the lack of aesthetic education in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the low level of literary criticism, the want of philosophical breadth, and the confusion of ethics and aesthetics which led to moralizing in judging works of art.<sup>1</sup> Then there are undoubtedly striking peculiarities in the English system of education in general, which tend to make Englishmen naturally sit in judgment upon the world's masterpieces, and without any evil intentions. Many Britons *could* not understand or countenance the "Prologue," whether they would or no. One fact is demonstrated: there *was* and *is*, as Blackie tells us, a difference, either inherited or acquired, between the English and German mind, training, and moral constitution. Whatever the reasons, the disposition toward the "Prologue in Heaven" forms an interesting chapter in the psychology of English aesthetic criticism.

ADOLPH B. BENSON

YALE UNIVERSITY

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hauhart, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 ff., and notes.